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ABSTRACT

A study investigated what conscious listening strategies second language learners use when listening to authentic texts. Subjects were six college students of intermediate Spanish. They listened to three authentic audio and three authentic video texts. The introspective commentaries of the subjects on one of the video texts are discussed here. Subjects viewed the tape as much as desired and were allowed to take notes, while listening for details to answer five specific questions. They were advised to think about and comment on how they were processing information. Responses are analyzed for each question separately, focusing on the types of processing used by each student. It was found that the subjects used a variety of strategies for comprehending the text and answering detail questions, including paying continuous attention, previewing, recognizing key words, using background knowledge, taking advantage of text length to absorb content, using pauses to think about what they had heard, focusing on redundancy, and taking notes. It is concluded that the attention, motivation, and comprehension associated here with use of authentic videos indicates little harm and much advantage in their use in the second language classroom. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE)

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LISTENING PROCESSES AND AUTHENTIC TEXTS

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INTRODUCTION

It is generally understood today that listening comprehension is the result of three interrelated, recursive processes: perception, parsing, and utilization[1] (O'Malley, Chamot, and Küpper, 7). Although several theorists (see for example: Byrnes, 1; Richards, 8; Rivers, 9) share this perspective, the current research base in this area is clearly insufficient. O'Malley et al. suggest that what is needed is more research that "clarifies what listeners actually do while engaged in listening tasks (419)". Accessing information about how learners listen is made more difficult by the covert nature of the listening processes themselves. While recall protocols (James, 3) have proven to be effective measures of foreign language (FL) listening *comprehension*, adequate methods of accessing subjects' listening *processes* are still being sought. Introspective methods, in which subjects' report on their own processes and intuitions, have long been used in the field of psychology, sociology, and linguistics. There is an emerging validation and acceptance of introspective research methods in foreign language and second language (L2) research (Faerch and Kaspar, 2). Considering the current emphasis in FL education on the use of authentic texts and the prevalence of video in the language classroom, there is a particular

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need for investigating learners' processing of authentic video texts via introspective methods.

THE STUDY

The purpose of the present study is to describe what FL learners think they are doing when listening to authentic texts. That is, what types of conscious listening strategies do they employ? In a previous study (Long, 5), learners indicated that they were more attentive to and motivated by authentic audio and video texts than by those that were primarily pedagogical in nature. Although some educators question the appropriateness of authentic listening texts for beginning students, Lund (6) has stressed that authentic listening *texts* may be used at any stage of FL instruction as long as listening *tasks* are adjusted accordingly. For these reasons, it was determined that only authentic listening texts would be exploited throughout the study.

The study investigated intermediate Spanish learners' comprehension of three authentic audio and three authentic video texts. The present article represents only a small portion of the total data from this study. It focuses on the introspective commentaries of six subjects on a single authentic video text.

SUBJECTS

The subjects were six students enrolled in two different sections of Spanish 104.01, fourth-quarter Spanish, at The Ohio State University. For most students, Spanish 104 represents the final course of the foreign language requirement and the last Spanish course that they will ever take. About sixty percent of the students enrolled

in the course have completed two or more years of high school Spanish, the course is taught by full-time instructor or advanced graduate teaching associates. Demographic data for the six subjects is presented in Table 1.

TEXT

The authentic text used in this portion of the study is a selection from the América Video Library (Liskin-Gasparro and Hallberg, 4). These materials consist of special features designed for the Hispanic TV audience in the United States. The segment used in the present study concerns the origins of *tapas* (appetizers) in Spain and the growing popularity of *tapas* bars and restaurants in the United States. The text is approximately 6 minutes 20 seconds in length, and the word rate varies across speakers. In three of the pertinent sections, for example, we find word rates (see Richards, 8) of 234 words per minute (fast) for Sergio Urquidi, 156 words per minute (moderately slow) for Penelope Casas, and 168 words per minute (average) for Felipe Rojas.

TASK DEFINITION

In the pilot phase preceding this study, subjects listened to variouse types of authentic and pedagogical Spanish texts. Afterwards, they stated the main idea and as many details as they could remember, and commented on how they were able to extract meaning from the text. Although all of the subjects said that they used vocabulary recognition as their principal listening strategy, there were

Table 1 **Demographic Information by Subject**

	ERIKA	ANDREW	STACEY	MANDY	SCOTT	APRIL
HS SPANISH*	2	3	4	4	3	2
OSU SPANISH	4	2	3	3	4	3
LISTENING ABILITY	F	G	F	F	F	G
OUTSIDE PRACTICE	N	Y	N	N	N	N
TRAVEL	N	N	PUERTO RICO	SPAIN	N	MEXICO
EXPECTED GRADE	B+	B+	B	B	B	A

* Years of High School Spanish.

abundant indications that other types of strategies were also in operation. Based on the results of the pilot study, it was hypothesized that specific listening tasks might be linked with specific patterns of strategy use. In the present study, therefore, each authentic text was paired with a logical listening task, such as listening for the main idea, noting specific details, sequencing, noting irrelevancies, predicting outcomes, and evaluating. For the *tapas* text, sujects were asked to listen for the following details:

1. What are *tapas?*
2. How did they originate?
3. Where can you get *tapas* in the United States?
4. How do *tapas* bars in the United States differ from those in Spain?
5. Who has written a best-selling *tapas* cookbook?

PROCEDURES

Subjects came individually to the investigator's office to complete the listening tasks, which took a little less than one hour. A tape recorder was used as a record keeper and ran continually throughout the session. The videocassette recorder used to play the text was under the complete control of the sujects. They were encouraged to pause, rewind, and listen as many times as necessary in order to complete the task. Paper and pencil were provided for note-taking, if the subjects wished. In addition to noting the relevant details, subjects were advised to focus and comment on how they were processing the information, that is, how it was that they "got the meaning" or what prevented them from comprehending. A warmup and practice period with a different text was provided.

RESULTS

Table 2 summarizes the subjects' responses to the five detail questions. In general, Erika, Andrew, Stacey, Mandy, and April easily identified the segments of the video text containing the information pertinent to each question, although they were not always able to zero in on the specific answer. Scott, on the other hand, was unable to comprehend almost all of the text. According to Scott's demographic information (see Table 1), he took three years of high school Spanish and four quarters of Spanish at the university. This latter datum indicates that Scott scored very low on the placement test and had to begin with the lowest level Spanish course at Ohio State. In the remainder of this section, subjects' introspections about each of the detail questions will be presented, followed by an analysis of listening processes that may be inferred from their comments.

Question one, "What are *tapas?*", elicited a variety of interesting responses. Erika, for example, stated: "First of all, I was thinking, 'I know I've heard the word *tapas* before. 'I was just trying to figue out what the heck they are. Then I heard them talking about calamari, and I love the stuff. Then I heard them talk about something else. Then they started showing the different dishes, and I thought, 'OK. It's not a certain kind of food. It's different kinds of hors d'oeuvres'. So I figured that." Andrew said: "I know it's food, but it's a whole different..., it's a whole bunch of food. I mean, I heard..., fried, raw... I heard sushi. Are they kind of like appetizers? Whoosh! OK. Now what was that word? OK, *tapas* are like appetizers, something like that." He related this answer to his own

Table 2 **Subject Responses to Detail Questions**

Subject:	ERIKA	ANDREW	STACEY	MANDY	SCOTT	APRIL
Question:						
1. What are *tapas*?	+	+	-	+	+	+
2. How did they originate?	+/-	+	+/-	-	-	+/-
3. Where can you get *tapas* in the U.S.?	-	+	-	-	-	-

Table 2 **Subject Responses to Detail Questions**
(continued)

Subject:	ERIKA	ANDREW	STACEY	MANDY	SCOTT	APRIL
4. How do *tapas* bars in the U.S. differ from those in Spain?	+	+	+	+	+	+
5. Who has written a best selling *tapas* cookbook	+	-	-	-	-	-

personal experience, "I worked in a bar once, in El Coyote, and we always served appetizers and stuff." Stacey was only sightly off track in her answer. "Are they clams or some sort of seafood? Well, they just seemed to use *tapas* as a very general term, like it's food in general, but then I saw all sorts of seafood. What would you call it in English? It seemed to be kind of white, like a sandwich, kind of. Was it fried?" Mandy was right on target: "Oh, gosh. Um. I guess they're like little types of food. You know what I mean? Like appetizer things." Scott guessed: I don't know. Is it a meal? A snack? Um." April was very accurate in her response: "*Tapas* are like little snacks or appetizers. They eat just about anything on little tiny saucers". Andrew, who had no difficulty with any of the questions, seems to have developed his listening skills to the point where they have become automatic. Prior to beginning the listening task, he reported that he speaks Spanish frequently with friends and foreign students. Because of the automaticity of these processes, however, Andrew experienced some difficulty in verbalizing how he listens.

Analysis: Erika's comments indicate two types of processing. First, she heard a familiar word, calamari (actually, *calamares* in Spanish). Because of the word recognition, she was able to associate the display of hoers d'oeuvres in the video with the topic of *tapas*. Andrew used a multiple word recognition strategy to compile evidence for his correct answer by focusing on the Spanish words for *fried, raw, and sushi*. He also relied on background information in his responses. Recalling his personal experiences as a waiter in a bar, Andrew put into effect a schema for appetizers. The remaining subjects, Stacey, Mandy, and Scott, relied on the visual rather than verbal

input in arriving at their answers. Stacey, for example, uses visual terms like "I saw" and "it seemed to be kind of white." April noted the "little saucers" and Mandy the "little types of food" Both of these terms relate to the small portions represented in the video. Because Scott seemed to have very little understanding of any of the verbal input, one must draw the conclusion that he guessed the answer from the visual input.

The origin of *tapas,* question two, was more difficult. Although Erika, Andrew, Stacey, Mandy, and April, all identified Spain as the place where *tapas* originated, only Andrew and April specified southern Spain. The tradition itself was captured only by Andrew and Mandy. Andrew stated: "I got it was like a century ago in the south of Spain and they were drinkin'... they wanted something like sausage or ham to eat with their drink ... and that's how it started." Mandy stated, "It originated in a bar, a Spanish bar. I don't know what she's doing. A plate over ham or something. I don't know. They put it over something."

Analysis: The verbal input for this segment had a very slow word rate and contained many food-related words commonly taught in first-year Spanish courses. As a result, word recognition as fairly accurate. In addition, the speaker gave a demonstration of the original custom of balancing a small saucer of tidbits or a slice of meat over the top of the sherry glass. Surprisingly, Mandy was the only subject who clearly associated this blatant visual cue with the auditory message in arriving at her answer.

"Where can you get *tapas* in the United States?", question three, was an easy detail for all subjects. Having the question in advance allowed them to listen for place

names of U.S. cities. Some subjects were even able to name a few of the restaurants.

Analysis: Word recognition was again a major processing strategy, supported by an advance organizer in the form of the detail question. Even though they were given a Spanish pronunciation, the cities of Miami, Washington, and *Nueva* York were easily recognized. However, the fact that some of the subjects were able to name the restaurants indicates that the visual input was also significant. Although in some cases the name of the restaurant was mentioned by the speaker, generally it appeared as a subtitle or on the awning or entry to the restaurant itself.

Question four, "How do *tapas* bars in the United States differ from those in Spain?", was somewhat problematic for the subjects. One reason may be the lack of visual cues. Erika determined that the custom of taking *tapas* was more formal in one of the countries than the other, but she became confused. "I couldn't tell, they kept going back and forth. OK, so they're less informal in Spain? Oh. They're more informal in Spain, more formal in the United States. That's where I was getting confused. I thought the restaurants were in Spain, and, like the first part. Stacey also reversed the customs: "Were the bars in Spain the ones where you sat there and they like did it in front of you? No, it wasn't that." Mandy was also confused: "Um. I don't know, but it's the difference between the United States and Spain. It's something about that they're hot, that they're more natural in the United States or something like that." April also applied the same misinformation: "Usually people go to bars to eat and talk and see their friends. It's kind of a social thing to do. Um,

what they said, they like their things in the United States not quite as hot, as spicy, as in Spain."

Analysis: Here, Erika and Stacey seem to be using a pairing strategy in their processing. That is, the recognized a formal/informal element relating to Spain and the United States. Beginning language learners often rely on the same strategy in learning antonyms, such as short/tall. Frequently, however, they are unable to separate or assign the correct meaning to the individual members of the pair. In other words, they know that the pair has the meaning short/tall, but they cannot specify which term is which. April and Mandy's responses were interesting in their display of a dysfunctional application of background information about Mexican foods to Spanish *tapas*.

Question five, "Who has written a best-selling *tapas* cookbook?", proved difficult for everyone but Andrew. This finding is very surprising, in that the text provides multiple clues to the answer. Not only does the author speak in the video, but her name appears in print during the scene, and the cookbook itself is displayed with the author's name clearly visible. Erika explained the oversight as follows: "And I don't know who wrote the book. I completely forgot about the question. Personally, I was just trying to figure out what *tapas* were, exactly." After being encouraged to rewind and seek the answer, Erika located the pertinent segment quickly, but still missed the name: "That's it. Did they mention who wrote the book, though?" Stacey was unable to locate the key segment for herself, but she identified "that woman" as the author of the cookbook after the investigator rewound and played the scene again. Mandy could neither identify the segment nor the author, even with the investigator's help. Scott was lost throughout most of the text. When asked about the cause of

his lack of comprehension, he hypothesized: "I don't know. It might have been the length. I didn't see anything." April reported simply, "Um. I think, basically, I missed the last question."

Analysis: Because this segment occurred close to the beginning of the text, the subjects were still in a "warmup" phase of processing that may have made it difficult for them to concentrate on the visual and verbal input simultaneously. Erika's comments illustrate this interesting phenomenon:

> Like, when they talked about writing the book, I wasn't even paying attention to her name on the screen. OK, I was trying to listen and I wasn't looking. It's like I can either look or listen. No, it's (the subtitle) no use at all. Like, I know when I've watched Spanish movies with subtitles, like "*La Historia Oficial*" of Argentina, I watched that, I rmember, in high school and I missed it, so she the teacher let me take it home. And I watched it, and like the first part, watching it, I was kind of looking at the pictures, but I was watching the sub-titles. and I couldn't remember who was who, because I was reading the subtitles and not paying attention, and they go so fast. So then, I had to go back and I tried to like watch the movie. And then in Spanish 103, we watched it again, so I'd already seen it twice. so this time, it was easier for me to associate the picture with the subtitle. Again, the first time I read it. The second time I watched it. And the third time, I saw it. A lot of things I missed the first two times I was able to get. So I really *understood* and I was able to get it both at the same time. So I didn't even notice I was listening."

GENERAL COMMENTS ON PROCESSING

This small portion of the larger study provides some interesting insights into how FL learners listen to and process an authentic video text. Subjects in the present study utilized a variety of strategies in attempting to comprehend the text and answer the detail questions:

1. **Paying attention.** These subjects recognized the benfits of "going with the flow." As April concluded, "Don't stop listening if you get stuck."
2. **Previewing.** All six subjects elected to play the video through completely before going back and relistening to the passages that they identified as key segments (those containing answers to the detail question). This may be viewed as an organizing or orienting strategy.
3. **Recognizing key words.** As in the pilot study word recognition was cited frequently as a listening strategy. Indeed, this was the primary strategy that was verbalized.
4. **Utilizing background knowledge.** Andrew's comments highlight the application of background knowledge to listening comprehension. The knowledge gained from his experiences working in a bar, enabled Andrew to comprehend the concept of *tapas* and *tapas* bars very easily. However, with respect to April and Mandy's mistaken comparison of *tapas* to spicy Mexican food, it is obvious that background knowledge can also prove dysfunctional.

5. **Taking advantage of lengthy text.** Although Scott thought that the length of the text prevented him from understanding, April used that length to her advantage: "Sometimes they were saying something I didn't... they were just kind of going on about something. So I'd try to think about what I'd already heard."
6. **Utilizing pauses.** Some of the subjects mentioned that they utilized pauses in the text to think about what they had already heard.
7. **Focusing on redundancy.** By focusing on redundancies and enumerations, subjects were able to build up details leading to the correct answer.
8. **Taking notes.** The subjects took very few notes, but rather tried to concentrate on watching and listening. As April reflected, "I usually just wanted to listen, because if I take time and try to write it, and really try to think about it, I just miss what he's saying."

CLASSROOM IMPLICATIONS

It is clear from even this very small sample, that FL learners *are* conscious of how they process aural input from authentic video texts. They are able to verbalize at least some of these processes with minimal instruction, prompting, and probing from an investigator. Task specification does not preclude nor prevent subjects from a more global understanding of the text. The use of a tape recorder as a record-keeping instrument is a very effective research tool. Allowing subjects complete control over manipulation of the text revealed that they use a multi-layered processing

strategy, watching first for visual cues, then listening for audio cues. Some learners find the audiovisual mode to be helpful in comprehending authentic texts, while other learners are distracted by the visual input and feel that they are, as a result, less attentive.

Foreign language educators are extremely interested in the use of authentic videos as instructional materials, not only as listening texts, but also in the study of structure, vocabulary in context, and as a means of conveying cultural information. Very little data is currently available on the effects of such materials on the acquisition of a foreign language.

It is interesting to note that in the present study most of the subjects pondered the nature of video and its advantages and disadvantages to comprehension, without any prompting from the investigator. Embedded in Erika's comments are two crucial concerns. First, some students must separate the visual domain from the verbald in order to comprehend a video text. Secondly, after using this type of processing strategy, Erika was able to really "listen" and to assimilate both domains at once. Stacey, also, found the combination of sight and sound to be distracting: "I think the thing that made this [video] harder is that it had a lot of pictures. I didn't pay as much attention, because I was watching". In contrast, April found the video to be very helpful. She stated: "When you have a video it always helps, because there may be words you've forgotten, but you know what they mean, and you see the picture and it clicks with what they're saying. Yeah, the pictures always help. I try to relax and make associations".

Unfortunately, the research base in the fields tends to lag behind classroom practice, and practitioners must take their best guess as to whether a specific strategy,

method, or material should become part of the instructional program. In the case of authentic videos, the attention, motivation, and comprehension associated with these materials, indicate that there is a little harm and, indeed, many benefits in their classroom usage. Educators should not be afraid to use authentic video materials, even at the earliest stages of instruction, providing they follow common-sense guidelines, such as these:

1. Simplify the listening task, rather than the listening text.
2. Teach students to use a variety of listening strategies.
3. Use introspection as a learning/teaching tool. Encourage students to be attentive to their learning processes and to share them with others.

END NOTES

1. During perception, attention is focused on the oral text. Sounds, and probably key words and phrases, are retained in echoic memory. Parsing refers to the segmentation or chunking of input into meaningful mental representations for storage in short term memory. utilization is the process of relating these representations to existing knowledge stored in long term memory. These three processes are not separate and sequential, but rather overlap each other. Recycling and modification take place as a result of prior and subsequent processes.

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